

VIEWPOINTS

Flood of retail growth about to hit Hoke

A tsunami is about to hit Hoke County! The tide of commercial development is rapidly rising outward from Fayetteville along the US 401 corridor. After years of tremendous residential growth in that part of the county, the commercial growth is moving in. If you travel this route and haven't noticed the activity in this area, you must be sleeping on your commute or distracted by the traffic. Just in the past few months, large areas of previously forested land have been cleared to make way for office buildings, stores, restaurants, medical support infrastructure, housing and all the things needed to support the burgeoning population of Hoke County. The highway has been upgraded with new traffic lights and turnaround facilities. Developers are scrambling to attract these land users, hoping to turn this previously rural land into high priced commercial real estate. Hoke residents will embrace these new establishments which will afford them the things they need, and spare them many trips to Fayetteville.

For years, I have heard the complaints that residential growth does not generate the large tax base like commercial development, while creating the requirement for new schools. This is somewhat true, but the commercial development has been delayed by the lack of adequate water and wastewater services, so there has been no one to blame. This is one of those chicken and egg dilemmas. Unpredictability of the final cost of providing large utility



Frog Holler Philosopher
Ron Huff

projects and uncertainty in the number of users who will buy the service makes the financial planning of these projects very difficult. Growth continues to put pressure on the constantly expanding water system and cost of implementation has delayed the long awaited sewer system. While Hoke has struggled to provide the needed services, the establishment of a sanitary sewer collection and treatment system is tremendously expensive and relies on customers for economic feasibility. Developers are asked to bear some of the cost, but they cannot bear the cost of establishing regional treatment facilities. This is where government needs to step in and help with the start up costs of these massive ventures.

How did the sewer systems of towns and cities ever get started? In many cases, it was the government work programs established during the depression that laid the collection lines that provided the customer base needed to establish treatment facilities. We hear a lot about government intervention, inefficiency and meddling in our lives, but this is one good example of how government can lend a helping hand to get things started, and a further example of how infrastructure projects can be good investments.

It has been recently reported that the long-awaited Hoke waste-

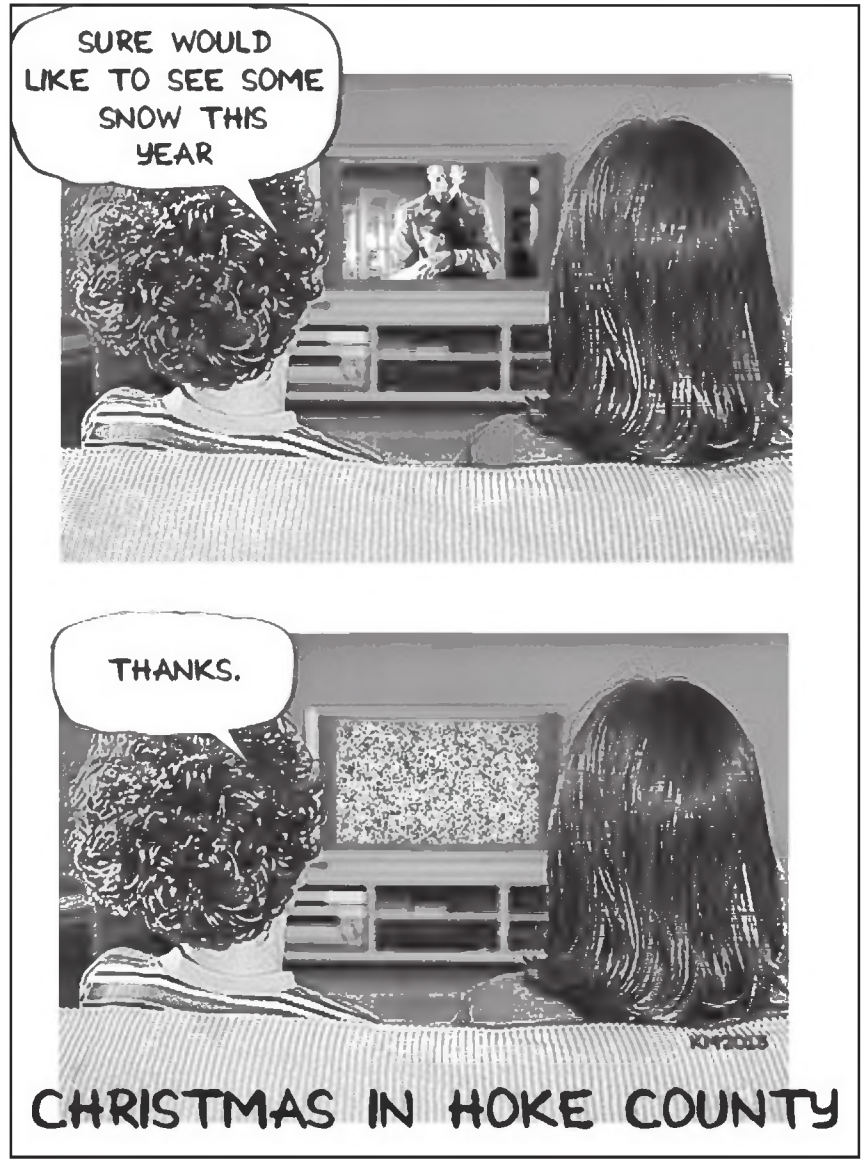
water system went out for bids and that the bids were higher than expected. Who could be surprised at this? I have also heard that Hoke is in line for a substantial grant and loans to help get the system off the ground. I hope it is enough!

For several years now, Hoke County has provided wastewater services in limited areas by purchasing treatment from PWC, the Fayetteville utility provider, and the City of Raeford. Studies have been done which address the feasibility of expanded cooperation between area providers. There was not much incentive for the City of Raeford to participate, as it needed its capacity to serve existing customers while maintaining a cushion for growth. The recent closing of the Water intensive operation at the House of Raeford has left the Raeford plant with additional treatment capacity. Although treatment is only part of the equation, it is a vital and expensive piece of the puzzle.

While PWC has worked well with Hoke County, it is always a little uncomfortable to rely on the services of others when one is obligated to the customer base. The Chamber of Commerce recognizes the need for adequate water and wastewater services to attract our share of the area's commercial growth. They are attempting to open a dialogue between all interested parties in an effort to facilitate a regional solution. I wish them and the citizens of Hoke County good luck!

"No wastewater in our pond!" say the frogs.

More later.



Redistricting is a mess that needs fixing

BY STEVE FORD

The "peaceable kingdom," where lions lie down with lambs amid other unlikely combos, turns out to be not so far-fetched when it comes to one of North Carolina's most vexing policy challenges. While there are holdouts who enjoy their status as predators – or who don't want to risk becoming prey – many conservatives and liberals agree that the state's redistricting procedure is a mess that needs fixing.

Which group represents the lions and which the lambs? Well, let's say that's in the eye of the beholder.

Nobody would mistake Paul Stam, the House Speaker Pro Tem, for anything less than a loyal Republican and staunch conservative. But he has been pushing for redistricting reform ever since Democrats ran the show in the General Assembly and drew congressional and legislative voting district boundaries to their liking. Since Stam clearly doesn't want to be mistaken for a hypocrite, he's making the same kind of arguments now that his party is in charge. That puts him in a league with liberal-minded reformers appalled by how the line-drawing process has been abused.

A handy way to describe that abuse is to say that instead of letting voters choose their legislators, it lets legislators choose their voters.

Redistricting is a chore undertaken by the General Assembly at the outset of each decade, after the national census. The goal is to adjust the boundaries of congressional and legislative districts to account for population changes. Districts represented by members of Congress, the state Senate and the state House are supposed to be more or less the same size as others in the respective categories.

But that's where the age-old, disreputable art of gerrymandering comes into play. Politicians can and do skew the lines to favor their party, powerful incumbents and themselves.

'It's our turn'

This state's Republicans had long chafed at what they saw as rough treatment at the hands of Democrats who controlled the redistricting machinery for decades. So when they took control of both legislative

houses in the 2010 elections, they set out to fix the Democrats' wagon.

Specialists used computers to draw districts finely calibrated to maximize GOP chances. The basic technique was to group as many Democratic voters as possible into as few districts as possible. That gave Republican candidates elsewhere a big advantage.

The payoff came in 2012, when the state's congressional delegation ended up split 9-4 in favor of the GOP, even though Democratic candidates took 51 percent of the overall vote. Legislative Republicans padded their majorities to levels where no gubernatorial veto could be sustained if party discipline held.

The packing of Democratic voters into certain districts also meant that many black residents, who tend to favor Democratic candidates, were given the same treatment. That has given rise to lawsuits claiming violations of the federal Voting Rights Act, which is supposed to protect the voting strength of racial minorities. Legal tussles involving redistricting and minority rights have been fought with regularity in North Carolina over recent decades – more so than in any other state, and another sign of how dysfunctional our redistricting exercise has become.

"Skip" Stam explained to his hometown crowd a fact of political life: Redistricting reform has the best chance when neither party can anticipate the outcome of the next census-year election. In other words, the temptation for a party that expects to win that election, and thus maintain its power by drawing favorable district lines, is too great.

In keeping with that rule, reformers in the state House advanced a bill in 2011 – nine years before the next redistricting – and won final approval by a bipartisan 88-27 vote. Besides Stam, who was majority leader at the time, those in favor included Speaker Thom Tillis. (All the no votes were cast by other Republicans.)

The bill went nowhere in the Senate. It was reintroduced this year as H.B. 606, gathering 61 sponsors (a majority in the 120-member House), but was not brought to a vote in the face of continuing Senate resistance. The Republican leadership there, under President Pro Tem Phil Berger, has been adamant in pressing to secure partisan advantage while it

has the chance.

Fewer bug-splatters

H.B. 606 would delegate the drawing of district lines to the legislature's nonpartisan professional staff. Districts would have to be "reasonably compact" and "composed of convenient contiguous territory" – a marked contrast from the wildly spread-out and twisted shapes cutting across county, municipal and precinct boundaries that now are common and that confuse voters and officeholders alike. Staff-drawn district plans would be subject to up-or-down legislative votes.

The bill also includes this language, which gets to the heart of the matter: "No district shall be drawn for the purpose of favoring a political party, incumbent legislator, or member of Congress, or other person or group, or for the purpose of augmenting or diluting the voting strength of a language or racial minority group. In establishing districts, no use shall be made of any of the addresses or geographic locations of incumbents."

Redistricting reform is an essential tonic to restore the health of a political system that depends on the honest competition of candidates and ideas. It would combat voter apathy and make officeholders more accountable. And let's be honest: From the standpoint of those who seek to protect the interests of disadvantaged, vulnerable people, reform is especially important if it would curb undue influence amassed by those who show too little regard for folks who struggle just to get by.

Barring a court order rejecting North Carolina's current district maps, we won't redistrict again until 2020. That's a long enough interval to comport with Stam's rule of thumb – neither party should be confident that it'll be in the driver's seat by then. So let legislators, when they come to Raleigh in the spring, welcome their own version of the peaceable kingdom and join across party lines to give us voting districts that are fair and functional for all.

Steve Ford, former editorial page editor at Raleigh's News & Observer, is now a volunteer program associate at the North Carolina Council of Churches. This essay originally appeared on the Council's website.

TODAY'S HOMEWORK (Notes on Education)

"[Baker] found no relationship between a nation's economic productivity and its test scores. Nor did the test scores bear any relationship to quality of life or democratic institutions. And when it came to creativity, the U.S. 'clobbered the world,' with more patents per million people than any other nation... {snip}

The more we focus on tests, the more we kill creativity, ingenuity, and the ability to think differently. Students who think differently get lower scores. The more we focus on tests, the more we reward conformity and compliance, getting the right answer. {snip}

What has mattered most for the economic, cultural, and technological success of the U.S., [Baker] says, is a certain 'spirit,' which he defines as 'ambition, inquisitiveness, independence, and perhaps most important, the absence of a fixation on testing and test scores.' {snip}

Let others have the higher test scores. I prefer to bet on the creative, can-do spirit of the American people, on its character, persistence, ambition, hard work, and big dreams, none of which are ever measured or can be measured by standardized tests like PISA."

—Diane Ravitch, in "What You Need To Know About International Test Scores," a blog post referring to an article by Keith Baker entitled, "Are International Tests Worth Anything?"

Mandela taught us races can come together

Mandela's passing was mourned by more people than anyone on this planet, at least more than anyone in recent history. More than 90 heads of state attended. His achievements were made not through waging war against the enemies of his ideas of equality but by understanding why it was felt one group of people were superior to another. This one man's actions brought desegregation to South Africa.

The main cause of misunderstanding is the lack of knowledge. Without understanding, no person or group is able to form a relationship. This is the attitude that had existed in South Africa and this country too for more than 150 years. The lack of understanding between different groups of people is the main cause for this misunderstanding. The lack of desire to know and understand people of different races and cultures leads to distrust.

Mandela's achievements were accomplished not through waging war against those who opposed this views of equality but by understanding them. He learned their language and studied his captors, then began to understand their thoughts, to better know why they felt and thought the way they did. But more importantly, by his actions he showed to his enemy that he was not the individual they thought him to be. He was aware that the entire white population of South Africa was judging the

Paul Burnley



rest of the black South Africans by his actions.

Through the stress of being a prisoner in a white dominated country, and suffering more abuse than any white prisoner, he maintained his dignity and gained respect from those who once disrespected him. Through all the indignities he was exposed to, he followed the rules explained to him, which surprised his captors who expected him to resist. By these actions he gained the respect of those who had imprisoned him. He was so respected that when he was released after 27 years, and ran for president of South Africa, many of those who had been his captors supported him and worked with him to unite the races.

It was expected that after Mandela was elected president that there would be a violent blood bath in the country with race riots. But through Mandela's guidance and understanding of the white population, a peaceful transition was made. This transition was made because Mandela's idea and hope for South Africa was not for a single race, black or white, to run the country but both races working together in governing the country. This idea worked so well that the

majority of the white population supported his programs.

I saw a report on TV a few months ago on the progress in South Africa. It found that there are far fewer racial problems there today than there were before Mandela's programs were implemented. The races are working together and the country is progressing. In 10 years, Mandela's programs have accomplished what America has not been able to do in over 150 years.

Racial problems have caused this country to lose the respect and our position as leader of the free world. Other countries have moved past us in education, technology, economics and other fields because of our views on racial separation. Mandela proved that by making an effort to understand people of different races and cultures, people are able to overcome their misunderstandings. In most instances, they will find that they are more alike than they are aware.

Why is it thought people of different races and cultures do not want the same advantages of a better life for their families, a better education for their children, etc.? We in this country can learn from Mandela's actions. By working with those of different races and cultures, all groups are able to advance.

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